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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD

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SUBJECT: World AIDS Day Activities in Nigeria

11. Summary. The U.S. mission held events in Lagos and Abuja in commemoration of World AIDS Day on December 1, as well as throughout the month. PAS Abuja on December 1 screened the AIDS film documentary, "A Closer Walk," to a variety of government officials, NGO activists, and journalists, and later showed the film to invited guests of the Vice President's wife, Titi Abubakar, on Friday, December 5 at the Presidential Villa. Post is also in contact with the film's director, Robert Bilheimer, regarding licensing for national television broadcasting, based on a request from the Nigerian Television Authority. Post released the Washington-produced op-ed under Ambassador Meece's signature; it appeared on the December 5 editorial page of "The Guardian," one of Nigeria's most popular and professionally managed dailies. For its World AIDS Day event, PAS Lagos collaborated with local actors and USAID-funded Population Services Survival International to produce a play on December 6 at the shrine of former Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, who died of AIDS. End Summary.

World AIDS Day

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12. On December 1, the U.S. mission in Nigeria commemorated World AIDS Day in both Abuja and Lagos. In Abuja, the Public Affairs Section showed the AIDS documentary film, "A Closer Walk," to an audience of approximately 60 people, comprising government officials, NGO workers, people living with HIV/AIDS, and the media. U.S. Charg d'Affaires Roger Meece gave remarks, USAID mission director Dawn Liberi (who was included in two film clips of the documentary when she was USAID mission director in Kampala, Uganda) updated the audience on recent discussions in Washington regarding the USG's USD 2.4 billion contribution to the Global Fund, and John Ibekwe, the deputy coordinator of the National Network of People living with HIV/AIDS also spoke to those assembled. As host, the CPAO acted as moderator for the program.

13. The film, which is a very moving documentary detailing the scale of human suffering created by the HIV/AIDS virus, is also a testimony to the possibilities of coping with the disease and hope for the future. Most members of the audience were affected by the film's powerful message and the stories of those interviewed. Nigerian broadcast stations, including the Nigerian Television Authority's (NTA) Network News reported the Embassy's World AIDS Day program and the screening of the video, "A Closer Walk." NTA used Ambassador Meece's remarks on the U.S. Congress authorization of USD 2.4 billion to AIDS-affected nations as both a lead story with an accompanying sound bite. The Vice President's wife invited the Embassy to show the film at the Presidential Villa on December 5 at a dinner in honor of Jermain Jackson formerly of the U.S. musical group, the Jackson Five. Jackson was in Abuja to help prepare for Laila Ali's January 10 boxing match and a benefit concert for HIV/AIDS featuring American artists Ashante and DMX, among others.

14. Embassy Abuja is in touch with the film director, Robert Bilheimer, regarding licensing possibilities in Nigeria. Bilheimer has told us that he was aware that other U.S. missions both in Africa and elsewhere in the world showed the film on December 1, and has been pleased with U.S. government support. He is working with a South African film distribution company on developing an approach to licensing rights in Africa.

15. Also on World AIDS Day, PAS staff announced an awards competition on HIV/AIDS at the Fulbright Alumni Association Annual Conference at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Plateau State. A film viewing, "Scenarios From the Sahel," a collection of short films about HIV/AIDS, preceded the awards competition announcement. The awards competition invites university faculty and students to form committees to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS on

campus and in the immediate community. The competition was kicked off on December 1, 2003 and the deadline for the submission of reports is September 15, 2004. Three awards will be made ranging from \$3,000 to \$1,000.

16. On Saturday, December 6, the Lagos Public Affairs Section, in coordination with well-known Nigerian actor Bassey Okon and Population Services International, hosted the matinee and evening production of a play at the New Africa Shrine in Ikeja, Lagos. The play "A Word Is Enough," was written and directed by Okon and his cast, and was performed to over 400 secondary students and faculty at noon, with a repeat performance in the evening for an adult audience of roughly 500.

17. The production, which consisted of three separate short drama sketches, dealt with themes of HIV/AIDS education and also touched upon some of the many social questions inherent in the AIDS fight in Africa. As part of both programs, snacks, t-shirts, caps and condoms were distributed to attendees, the cost of which was underwritten by a grant from Population Services International.

18. The location, The New Africa Shrine, was chosen due to its significance as the performance center and spiritual home of legendary Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, who died of complications related to AIDS in 1997. In a tribute to their father, and in an effort to show support for the program, Fela's two children, Femi and Yeni Kuti attended the evening program. Media coverage included a same-day article that appeared in the This Day newspaper, a leading daily. Other HIV/AIDS-Related Events in December

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-- As a lead-in to World AIDS Day, the Lagos Information Section conducted a targeted briefing prior to the observance. The session, in collaboration with a Nigerian NGO dedicated to educating journalists on HIV/AIDS, addressed the theme of stigmatization that has run through all of the Lagos PAS events in December. Abuja's Information Resource Center hosted a roundtable and workshop on HIV/AIDS for information specialists.

-- The Mission began December with the release of a special HIV/AIDS issue of the post's monthly magazine. The edition carried stories on stigmatization, USG programs to improve HIV education and media strategies for reducing HIV stigma.

-- On December 4, the Lagos Information Resource Center held a successful roundtable on the topic of "De-stigmatization of AIDS/HIV in Nigeria." Almost 50 people attended, representing various aspects of the interested community around AIDS in Lagos, including NGOs, journalists, health care workers, and researchers. Panelists in the roundtable included representatives from an NGO working with young people, a journalists' group focused on AIDS issues, Christian and Muslim groups working on AIDS in their communities and an organization for people living with HIV/AIDS. The last speaker was especially powerful and effective, tying together the themes of HIV prevention among youth with a frank and open discussion of sex and sexuality.

-- Post released the Washington-produced op-ed under Ambassador Meece's signature; it appeared on the December 5 editorial page of "The Guardian," one of Nigeria's most popular and professionally managed dailies. Ambassador Meece slightly modified the Washington boilerplate text to include Nigeria-specific information.

-- The Lagos Information Section participated in a December 5 AFNET dialogue that provided specific de-stigmatization suggestions from a U.S. doctor and the head of a Washington D.C. HIV/AIDS outreach organization. Specifically, Nigerian participants learned about successful Washington-area community strategies for branching out to low-income families through apartment block representatives. Additionally, the doctor addressed Nigerians' concerns about identifying HIV infection in poor environments and the risks of announcing one's status. Most significantly, several community and religious leaders left the dialogue with clear ideas about how they could reach out to their constituents.

-- Embassy Abuja participated in a December 16 AFNET on People Living With HIV/AIDS, with an audience comprised of healthcare professionals, government officials from the Executive and Legislative branches, NGO workers and the media. Participation and audience receptivity was very strong; many questions were

referred to the Mission's Center for Disease Control (CDC) for answers after the program due to the technical nature of the subject.

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